



The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: The Role of Funders in Conflict

November 2014

OVERVIEW

In 2014, the Peace and Security Funders Group (PSFG) hosted three panel discussions that brought together funders and practitioners to discuss how funders can more effectively contribute to conflict prevention, conflict mitigation, and peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict settings. Borne from a collective interest in identifying practical tools for positive funder engagement in light of continued conflicts around the world, including Syria, Iraq, Ukraine, and the Central African Republic, the panel discussions aimed to spark dialogue and draw out lessons learned.

This white paper reviews the key takeaways and recommends next steps for advancing the conversation to further improve the efficacy of funders working in these challenging conflict and post-conflict settings. Next steps include forming the Conflict and Atrocities Prevention Working Group; including multi-lateral donors in these conversations; hosting a series of off-the-record dialogues on failure; and exploring a workshop to offer best practices for new funders in this space.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: GOOD PRACTICES FOR FUNDERS

The panel discussions were held at three major funder conferences in the United States and Europe: the PSFG annual conference, the European Foundation Centre's annual meeting, and the International Human Rights Funders Group bi-annual conference.¹ By conducting similar discussions across three different groupings of funders, PSFG hoped to elicit concrete best practices and lessons learned in the pre-, mid-, and post-conflict stages. Participants at these conferences were primarily private and public foundation staff. Because only a handful of multi-lateral donors, UN agencies, and government donors were present, the below lessons and recommendations are principally reflective of the experiences of one sector of the funding community.

Focusing on concrete lessons learned and drawing upon best practices from real case studies, the highly interactive panel sessions included diverse viewpoints from both experts working directly in conflict settings and foundation staff. The panels and subsequent discussion sessions aimed to address these basic but complicated questions:

- What type of grantmaking is best in a pre- and post-conflict setting (e.g., rapid response, multi-year, general support)?

¹ For details on each panel, please see the Comparison Chart.

- What is the appropriate role for foundations and philanthropists? Are there ways in which like-minded funders can better collaborate in a fast-changing and difficult environment?
- What do advocates and experts on the ground need?
- Are there ways that funders *hurt* peacebuilding efforts?

From the conversations there emerged several common lessons learned and recommendations for improving the efficacy of funding in pre- and post-conflict settings. Overall, funders acknowledged that funding in conflict and post-conflict settings is inherently risky. **Funders must be willing to assume some degree of risk when engaging in these settings.** While the risk of failure is real, the rewards may be great: funders that are flexible, creative, and willing to take risks can play an important role in preventing and mitigating conflict.

To minimize the potential for failure, or worse, the potential to inflict harm, an **in-depth knowledge of the context is fundamental.** Prior to engaging in a conflict or post-conflict setting, funders must understand the context, the drivers of conflict, key conflict issues, potential spoilers, and constituencies for peace. Participants stressed that funders can have the greatest impact in areas where they have experience and knowledge.

There was also agreement that **more resources need to be devoted to conflict prevention.**

Additionally, there was a great **emphasis on supporting locally-led initiatives.** When supporting local efforts, funders should consider the interplay between local, national, and international efforts and leverage their ability to connect local actors with national and international players. Some participants also cautioned that funders should do their homework before selecting their partners to ensure that they are not supporting organizations with little interest in peace.

Establishing relationships and partnerships with grantees and other key stakeholders is also important. By staying connected with partners and grantees, funders are able to stay on top of the situation and build networks for peace.

Finally, **peacebuilding work is long-term and requires a long-term commitment.** When engaging in a conflict area, funders should think about long-term strategies for building and maintaining peace. While a long-term commitment is important, **flexibility is also critical.** Changes in the context may result in situations in which the best option for funders is to disengage. Knowledge of the context, flexibility, strong partnerships, and continued evaluation, allows funders to make informed decisions about when to change their strategies or when to disengage.

NEXT STEPS: FROM PANELS TO IMPROVING PRACTICE

While the panels took place at three different conferences, with three different groups of funders, the conversations were similar. Overall, there seems to be agreement amongst funders on several key foundational principals for funding in conflict and agreement that there needs to be more focus on conflict prevention.

How do we go from *discussing* practice to *improving* practice?

First, PSFG will seek to weave in larger donors (e.g., multi-lateral organizations, UN agencies, World Bank Group), most of whom were not included in these discussions, for additional conversations to see if there are additional lessons that can be learned from these donors.

Second, based on the information garnered from these panel discussions, PSFG will explore developing a workshop (either in person or on YouTube) for funders new to the peace and security field. With the aim of improving donor practices, the workshop could offer advice, good practices, and things to avoid.

Third, PSFG can help advance the conversation on improving donor practices in conflict and post-conflict settings by facilitating a conversation on failure. We believe this conversation is critical, but needs to be structured in such a way as to truly elicit introspection and honest criticism, as well as a positive way to learn from these failures and share these lessons learned with others in a non-threatening way. In 2015, PSFG will launch a series of small-group, off-the-record dialogues to create the space for this type of learning.

Finally, in partnership with the International Human Rights Funders Group, PSFG recently launched the Conflict and Atrocities Prevention Working Group. The group's purpose is to be a space for learning, information-sharing, and collaboration, as well as a place for a dedicated group of funders seeking to draw others into this important, yet under-resourced space. Please contact Alexandra Toma (atoma@peaceandsecurity.org) if you'd like to join this working group.

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IHRFG Conference (January 2014)	PSFG Conference (April 2014)	EFC Conference (May 2014)
<p>Moderators: Alexandra Toma, Executive Director, PSFG and Ellen Friedman, Executive Director, Compton Foundation</p> <p>Panelists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark Freeman, Executive Director, Institute for Integrated Transitions (<i>Practitioner—think tank</i>) • Ariadne Papagapitos, Program Director, Peacebuilding, Rockefeller Brothers Fund (<i>Funder</i>) • Andrew Hudson, Deputy Executive Director, Crisis Action (<i>Practitioner—policy advocacy</i>) 	<p>Moderator: Evelyn Thornton, Institute for Inclusive Security/Hunt Alternatives Fund</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clare Lockhart, Institute for State Effectiveness (<i>Practitioner—think tank</i>) • Bridget Moix, Peace Direct (<i>Practitioner/Funder</i>) • Gary Slutkin, Cure Violence (<i>Practitioner—conflict resolution</i>) • Andrew Hyde, State Department (<i>Practitioner—government</i>) 	<p>Moderator: Alexandra Toma, PSFG</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haki Abazi, Rockefeller Brothers Fund (<i>Funder</i>) • Sarah Holewinski, Center for Civilians in Conflict (<i>Practitioner—advocacy</i>) • Stephen Pittam, Former Trust Secretary, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and Global Greengrants Fund (<i>Funder</i>)
Audience	Audience	Audience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funders (human rights)—international • Practitioners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funders (peace and security); primarily American 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funders; primarily European
Key Takeaways	Key Takeaways	Key Takeaways
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funders are reluctant to devote resources to conflict zones because of quickly changing and unpredictable situations. • Funders can easily misunderstand the context and underlying causes of conflict. Funders must research and analyze the “drivers” instead of the symptoms of conflict. For example, what are the implications that policies are having on the conflict? • Funders can and should support advocacy efforts to spread public awareness about the underlying issues of conflict, such as the small arms trade. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funders need to think more intentionally on how to build sustainable peace by supporting long-term peacebuilding work. • Funders need to be smarter about supporting alternative peace processes that engage and support constituencies for peace, rather than focusing on “spoilers” to the peace process. • Panelists emphasized the need to support work that is locally-driven, -led, -owned, and -implemented while cautioning that it is important that the local constituents be proponents of peace so as not to strengthen the “thugs.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donors are sometimes apprehensive about taking risks and not knowing if the work they support will work out or not. For example, funders may be slow to fund newer, innovative organizations due to a lack of understanding of the impact these organizations can make. • Before engaging in a conflict situation, funders should learn about the conflict, analyze it, understand what needs to be done, and where things currently stand. Overall, it’s better to be strategic and invest where funders have experience and understand the context.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funders should dedicate resources to increasing prevention efforts and stopping conflict before it occurs. • Funders can play a role in mobilizing civil society, creating networks that protect citizens from violence, and preventing and stopping conflict. • There is a need for donors to provide grantees with core funding, which provides critical flexibility in difficult and rapidly changing contexts. • Funders that are nimble, flexible, creative, and willing to take risk are able to play a key role in bringing diverse parties together and creating spaces for dialogue. • Foundations must be accountable to local civil society. • Large amounts of funding do not necessarily solve the problem. What has been important is ensuring that marginalized voices and women's movements have been part of the peacebuilding processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funders should work with local partners to understand how they can best support and amplify the work of local organizations. • Greater collaboration amongst funders is necessary to more efficiently mobilize resources and maximize impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funders should look for points of entry at the local level; however, in supporting local level efforts, they should not ignore broader efforts taking place. Sometimes the international community does have a role to play: supporting only local organizations may not be sufficient. • Peacebuilding work is long-term. It is important to commit to long-term support; however, staying the course does not guarantee success. • Donors should constantly evaluate the impact of their support, if it is not working, then sometimes it is best to leave. • Funders should consider connecting NGOs that work on conflict with long-term domestic agendas. • Donors should act to <i>prevent</i> conflict. • Foundations need to be connected to their partners/grantees and to the situation.
RECURRING THEMES		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth knowledge of the context and conflict is imperative. Funders should not engage unless they have done their due diligence. • More resources need to be devoted to conflict prevention. • Supporting locally led initiatives is critical. Funders should also consider the interplay between local, national and international efforts. • Funders should seek to support the work of their partners and be sure to stay connected to grantees and partners. • Peacebuilding work is long-term and requires a long-term commitment. • Funding in conflict and post-conflict settings is inherently risky: funders must be willing to assume some degree of risk. 		

Tips for Funders Working in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings

1. Do your research

- Prior to engaging a conflict or post-conflict setting, funders must understand the context, the drivers of conflict, key conflict issues, potential spoilers, and potential constituencies for peace.

2. Be prepared to take risks

- Conflict and post-conflict settings are inherently risky. Funders must be willing to assume some degree of risk when engaging in these settings. While the risk of failure is real, the rewards may be great: funders that are flexible, creative, and willing to take risks can play an important role in conflict prevention and mitigation, and peacebuilding.

3. Focus on Conflict Prevention

- Though it's more difficult to measure - and therefore fund - focusing on prevention is critical.

4. Know Your Partners

- Establishing relationships and partnerships with grantees and other key stakeholders is important. By staying connected with partners and grantees, funders are able to stay on top of the situation and build networks for peace.

5. Support Indigenous Efforts

- Funders should support locally-led initiatives and connect these to national and international efforts.

6. Provide Core Support

- To help ensure the long-term viability of civil society, funders should consider providing grantees with core support, rather than project-based support. Core support allows grantees to be flexible in volatile, rapidly-changing contexts.

7. Be a Connector

- By leveraging their ability to connect local actors with national and international players, funders can help build networks of peace.

8. Stay the Course

- Peacebuilding work is long-term and requires a long-term commitment. When engaging in a conflict area, funders should think about long-term strategies for building and maintaining peace.